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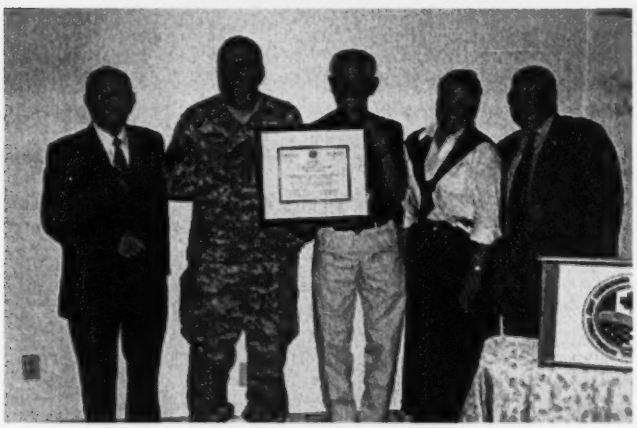
IJC Celebrates its First International Watershed Board



Announcing the IJC's first international watershed board are Commissioner Jack Blaney, Board Co-chairs Colonel Curtis Thalken and Bill Appleby, Commissioner Irene Brooks and Commissioner Allen Olson.

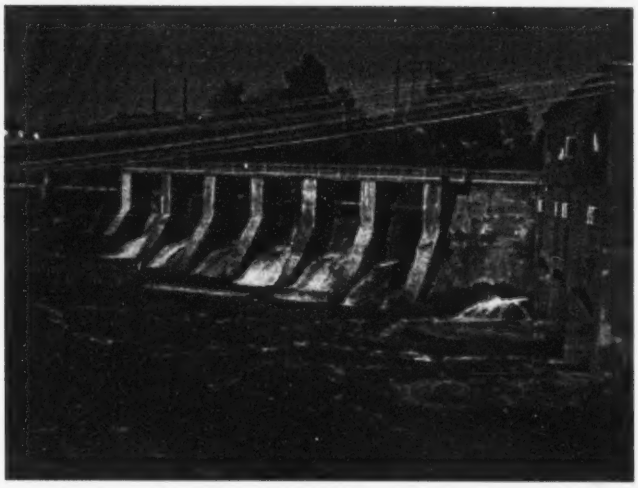
At a public meeting in the St. Croix River region in late August 2007, IJC Commissioners welcomed a new milestone for one of its advisory boards by celebrating the former International St. Croix River Board's transition to the International St. Croix River Watershed Board. While the Board's expanded orders and purpose were officially changed at the Commission's April Semi-Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C., the August meeting in Calais, Maine, on the border with New Brunswick, allowed

Commissioners and Board members to celebrate and explain the new designation with basin residents.

The concept of an international watershed board was first proposed by the Commission to both countries almost ten years ago and further defined in A Discussion Paper on the International Watersheds Initiative in June 2005. Because it is argued that watershed issues are best resolved by those who live and work in the region, the watershed initiative aims to broaden and enhance the capabilities of a number of existing IJC international boards to identify, prevent and resolve transboundary water issues based on a more holistic and participatory approach. This includes strengthening communication and cooperation among various local citizens and groups and the boards.

The St. Croix Board was chosen as the first IJC international watershed board because it had achieved the many elements of this approach. From 1915 through 2000, the Board's work concentrated on monitoring and advising on water quantity and quality issues, particularly compliance with the Commission's Orders of Approval for structures in the river. In 2002, the Board held a workshop to identify the state of the St. Croix River ecosystem and current trends and information gaps, and to build relationships with watershed stakeholders. It met with these stakeholders as well as other interested residents and government officials in November 2003, and in March and October 2004 to discuss how a watershed approach could be incorporated into the region's transboundary planning, and to promote a common vision of the watershed.

Next, the Board strengthened its outreach by developing a comprehensive directory of organizations and other interests in the watershed, expanding the range of issues discussed at its public meetings, and participating in other organizations'meetings. Perhaps most reflective of the value of the Board's new approach has been its work on the forthcoming State of the Watershed Report, and on creating a single map of the watershed to replace the separate and often disparate maps previously made by each country. The integrated digital map provides a common vision for regional planning and to anticipate potential issues that might arise under different conditions. All of these projects were created through partnerships with several local, state, provincial and federal agencies and organizations.



The spillway of the Milltown Dam
Photo credit: Frank Bevacqua

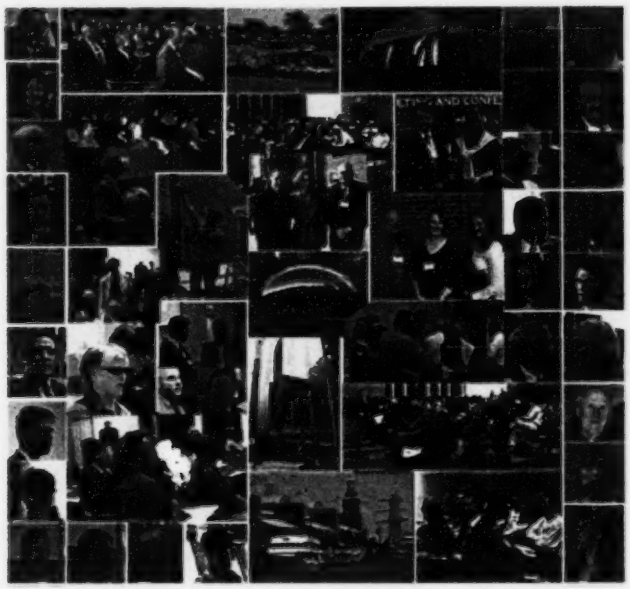
The Commission's new directive to the St. Croix Watershed Board thus expands the Board's range to include its traditional responsibilities and to proactively investigate issues, plans "or other developments, actual or anticipated, which have the potential to affect the quantity and quality of the water and the health of the St. Croix boundary waters aquatic ecosystem." It also directs the Board to work with and coordinate activities with all involved agencies, organizations and citizens to identify and resolve problems locally whenever possible, without replacing or duplicating others' efforts. The Board will report to the Commission at least annually on their work and progress to implement this new approach.

Given the Board's progress thus far, the Commission anticipates that the International St. Croix River Watershed Board's work will serve as a model for future expansion of the Commission's international watersheds initiative along the U.S. - Canadian border. Copies of the Commission's reports on this initiative, as well as the Board's new directive and webpage can be found at www.ijc.org.

2007 Biennial Meeting Highlights Urban Successes and Challenges for Great Lakes Watershed

Bold and creative public policy initiatives in urban areas are and will be increasingly essential to a healthy and sustainable Great Lakes watershed. This was a key message at the International Joint Commission's 2007 Great Lakes Biennial Meeting

and Conference, held last June at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The three-day "Sustainable Cities, Healthy Watersheds" event brought together citizens, scientists, researchers and representatives from all levels of government to share information about the region's cutting-edge scientific and policy initiatives and to discuss their views on Great Lakes water quality.



Participants and scenes from the 2007 Great Lakes Biennial Meeting and Conference. (Click image for larger version)

Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley and University of Illinois Chancellor Sylvia Manning welcomed attendees at the conference's opening reception. Stewart Brand, author of The Whole Earth Catalog and internationally known environmental and counterculture pioneer, then provided a keynote speech that introduced the concept of "ecopragmatism." While environmental issues have previously been addressed according to specific scientific, engineering, environmental or policy perspectives, global climate change forces us to change our approaches to solve issues in new ways that don't fit into specific ideologies, said Brand. He also emphasized that because more than half of the world's human population now lives in urban areas, we need to focus on the benefits cities can provide to the environment based on how people live in them, and the opportunities urban areas provide to their residents.

The conference's concurrent sessions investigated several specific connections between urban successes and challenges and the health of the Great Lakes. In a session on effective urban policy,

participants recognized that 80 percent of greenhouse gases come from metropolitan areas and thus their reduction must be part of effective regional planning. For example, Toronto, Ontario has used a balanced growth model since 1950 to encourage growth along subway station stops and limit air pollution from transportation and the need for more freeways.

Participants in the "Municipalities Matter" Stakeholders Forum and in the policy session on deteriorating sewer and wastewater treatment infrastructure both agreed that cities are playing an increasingly significant role in Great Lakes water quality because they must address aging infrastructure issues. Creative infrastructure improvements must be developed that are less costly, increase permeability, and reduce the need to expand already strained treatment systems. One idea was a watershed-wide Clean Water Trust Fund that would provide a stable source of funding for wastewater treatment upgrades and repairs. Another example is Milwaukee, Wisconsin's privatization of its wastewater treatment maintenance in 1998, which has saved the community at least $148 million.

The importance of focusing on urban sustainability in restoring and protecting the Great Lakes was echoed throughout most sessions. In the U.S. and Canada, mayors and city councils make decisions about zoning, development, road construction, water treatment and stormwater management, even parks and beaches. Conference attendees were urged to work with their municipal governments to create positive environmental change for their community and the entire Great Lakes watershed. At the same time, cities must have a seat at the table when critical decisions are being made at international, national, state and provincial levels. The future of the Great Lakes depends on how citizens rethink and retool their cities to be sustainable for its residents and for the ecosystem.

An example of this retooling was provided in a session on the environmental benefits of green building. The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Program has been used for neighborhood design in Chicago to increase density in existing urban areas rather than undertaking new suburban or even exurban construction. The LEED Program was also used by the Exelon Company at its Chicago headquarters, which has since reduced its electrical consumption by 43 percent and its water use by 30 percent. Downtown Toronto buildings are now air conditioned

through nonconsumptive use of cold water from Lake Ontario, which reduces electrical consumption during peak use periods in the summer.

The conference also included sessions that updated attendees on the status of the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal electric fish dispersal barrier to prevent the Asian carp from entering the Great Lakes, as well as urban health risks and updates on grass roots efforts to clean up Areas of Concern. The Governments of Canada and the United States also provided an update on their review of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, and participated in the Biennial Meeting's traditional town hall session.

The Commission presented the 2007 Biennial Award for Great Lakes Science to Dr. Gerald J. Niemi, director of the Center for Water and the Environment at the University of Minnesota-Duluth's Natural Resources Institute (see accompanying article). While many challenges were highlighted at the Biennial Meeting, most presentations left participants optimistic that the creativity and cooperation that Stewart Brand called for in his keynote speech is, in fact, happening in the Great Lakes region.

2007 Biennial Award for Great Lakes Science Recognizes Dr. Gerald J. Niemi

Dr. Niemi receiving the 2007 Biennial Award from IJC's Acting U.S. Chair Irene Brooks.

Dr. Gerald Niemi, Director of the Center for Water and the Environment at the University of Minnesota-Duluth's Natural Resources Institute, received the

Commission's 2007 Biennial Award for Great Lakes Science at the June conference in Chicago. The IJC created the award to publicly recognize that great science is essential for the successful restoration of the Great Lakes.

While Dr. Niemi has made extensive and well-known contributions in various fields of science and as a professor of biology for almost 20 years, he was nominated by fellow scientists and policymakers for his leadership to develop and complete the Great Lakes Environmental Indicators (GLEI) Project. Dr. Niemi created the project's concept and secured $6.4 million from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Science to Achieve Results program and the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). He brought together a diverse group of 27 scientists from 10 different U.S. and Canadian institutions to collaborate on this five-year project, with the goal of developing an integrated set of environmental indicators that can be used to assess the overall condition of the coastal regions in all five Great Lakes.

These researchers and their field crews sampled wetland vegetation, fish, benthic invertebrates, diatoms, water quality, birds, amphibians, and toxic compounds at 344 coastal wetlands and 104 bays and shorelines in the region. From this huge, diverse set of data they created an overall stress index, as well as 14 indicators based on their response to various stress gradients across the Great Lakes.

Dr. Niemi's vision of the GLEI collaboration, and his leadership to complete this massive project, has been a tremendous scientific success. The GLEI results are being incorporated into management plans and approaches for the Great Lakes, as well as other coastal waters. The project's process and results are being communicated to others through more than 25 peer-reviewed publications, 20 technical reports, two book chapters, and more than 170 presentations. Just as important, the project included more than 48 undergraduate and 36 graduate students and four post-doctoral associates, which ensures that part of the next generation of Great Lakes scientists are well trained.

The GLEI project and its results are expected to provide valuable tools for scientists and policymakers well beyond the Great Lakes region. More than half of the world's population lives within 63 miles or 100 kilometres of a coastline, and that percentage is expected to increase by 25 percent over the next 20 years. While the expanding

stresses to coastal resources from increasing development have traditionally been monitored in an individual basis, this new set of environmental indicators spans various levels of biological organization and is applicable across geographic regions. Dr. Niemi's vision will allow scientists and policymakers to more accurately measure the condition of coastal resources, diagnose stressors, communicate these results to the public more clearly, and better protect the health and quality of the coastal environment.

Commissioner's Corner

By Acting U.S. Chair Irene B. Brooks

The creation of the International St. Croix Watershed Board is a true watershed moment. Its existence is a prime example of the Commission's ecosystem-centered and decades-long approach to Great Lakes issues. Its report to governments for the 21st Century revolves around the international watershed initiative. It is the kind of effective watershed planning that I am and have been proud of throughout my career in government.

From my early days as a member of the East Bradford Township, Pennsylvania Planning Commission to my current role as Acting U.S. Chair of the IJC, I have witnessed the value and impact of good planning. When I served on commissions and boards at the township, county and regional levels, we were one of the fastest growing areas in Pennsylvania. Farms and green space were disappearing quickly, wells were going dry from overuse, and traffic congestion rose dramatically. The longer I worked on these and other issues, the more I recognized that bureaucratic community lines had to be erased if we were going to make land and water use more sustainable for the entire region.

That meant that we had to identify the right people quickly and get them to work together on mutual goals. We did this by maintaining a consistent transparent process that includes all stakeholders and sound science, while educating the broader public. Through this effective public policy approach, the nationally recognized Chester County Open Space Program has been successful in preserving more than 43,000 acres to date.

Many activities on the St. Croix river depend on good water quality

I applied this same philosophy of transparent public process during my tenure with the Delaware River Basin Commission, and with eight other interstate basin commissions and the Great Lakes Commission as well. Each organization was created to foster cooperation among various units of government for the rivers and lakes that they share. When the same participatory, fact-based, "think global, act local" process was used, the outcomes were almost always positive.

Ultimately I've learned that governments at all levels must give consistent and continual attention to a cooperative watershed approach. Without this persistent vigilance, it is easy for everyone involved to lose sight of needs of everyone affected by our decisions and actions. This is what makes the evolution of the IJC's Boards so important and worthwhile, to us and to the regions where they work. By using the watershed approach to issues facing transboundary waters, our Boards can play a key role in erasing community lines of ownership, reaching out and connecting with all sectors to reach consensus, and ensuring that consistent attention is given to anticipate and resolve issues in the entire watershed.

The international watersheds initiative is based on the premise that local people, given appropriate information and assistance, are best positioned to resolve local transboundary issues. As the International St. Croix River Watershed Board is already proving, and the Great Lakes region has shown over and over when the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement's ecosystem approach is used effectively at various levels, building these local, regional and even international connections can lead to substantial progress on issues facing the entire watershed, and help everyone to invest fully in the

region's present and future. It is a vital step in our organization's evolution, and an investment we at the IJC are proud to make.

Update on New Regulation Plan for Lake Ontario and St. Lawrence River

The boathouse of Boldt Castle, in the Thousand Islands district of the St. Lawrence Seaway. Credit: Alec Saunders.

In early September, the International Joint Commission extended its consultations with governments on a new regulation plan for Lake Ontario and St. Lawrence River water levels and flows. The IJC announced that it would continue consultations to allow more time for discussions with the governments in the basin: the Canadian and United States federal governments, and through the federal governments, with the provinces of Quebec and Ontario, the State of New York and First Nations. The scheduled public hearings throughout the basin and public comment period will also be postponed to a later date.

During its consultations with governments, it became clear to the IJC that more work was needed and governments requested additional time before the IJC releases a proposed decision for public comment. The IJC agreed that further consultations were worth pursuing. The IJC still intends to release a proposed decision for public comment and to hold public hearings, before making a final decision.

People

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Great Lakes Water Quality Board

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Jean Painchaud
Quebec Ministry of Environment

Jim Smith
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Basile Van Havre
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International Rainy Lake Board of Control

Welcomes:

Rick Walden, Interim Canadian Chair
Environment Canada

International Red River Board

Welcomes:

Dr. Kevin Cash
Environment Canada

Completing Service :

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The International Joint Commission prevents and resolves disputes between the United States of America and Canada under the 1909 Boundary Waters Treaty and pursues the common good of both countries as an independent and objective advisor to the two governments.